

ever in our history, and we are not teaching what it means to be an American.

You don't get to be an American by the color of your skin or where you come from. You get to be an American by understanding what we believe in. The common school itself was created 150 years ago, according to the late president of the American Federation of Teachers, Albert Shanker. He said the public school was created to help immigrant children learn the three Rs, and what it means to be an American, with a hope they would go home and teach their parents. The civic purpose of the public school is being fundamentally ignored in many parts of our country and this is one small step in that direction.

I am delighted that a bipartisan group of Senators and House Members—Mr. BOEHNER, Mr. MILLER, Representative BLACKBURN from Tennessee, and the principal sponsor, ROGER WICKER of Mississippi—played a role. I thank them for that.

AMERICAN BALD EAGLE COMMEMORATIVE COIN ACT

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I mention one other piece of legislation that may have a chance of passing. At least I can report there are now 68 U.S. Senators who have agreed to sponsor S. 2889 which will celebrate the recovery and restoration of the American bald eagle by making \$5- and \$10- and 50-cent commemorative coins.

Very often these so called coin bills are especially parochial. That is why we are required to have 67 Senators agree before we do one; usually by practice, nearly 300 House Members. Well, 300 House Members have agreed and nearly 70 Senators. That is because in 1782 the Founding Fathers established the bald eagle as the national emblem of the United States. Since then, the bald eagle has come to represent the spirit of American freedom, democracy, and strength.

It is my hope before we finish our business today we will honor and protect the symbol of America and cosponsor and enact the American Bald Eagle Commemorative Coin Act.

One reason Senators have signed on is that the eagle has been roaming the Halls with its handler, going into different offices. A number of Senators have called me from their office with the eagle perched in front of them. The eagle is a very successful lobbyist for himself.

If we cannot get the commemorative coin enacted today before we adjourn, I am sure we will be able to do so early next year.

I thank the Senator from Minnesota and the Senator from Ohio for giving me an opportunity to conclude my remarks.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The distinguished Senator from Minnesota is recognized on this glorious Saturday afternoon.

HELPING A VETERAN FAMILY WITH AIDS

Mr. COLEMAN. Mr. President, I had the great pleasure of sitting in the Presiding Officer's chair yesterday when one of our colleagues said goodbye, the distinguished minority leader. It was a very stirring and moving speech about what this institution is all about.

I sat in the Senate when the senior Senator from Oklahoma said goodbye after 20-something years in this institution. I was in the chair when the candidate for the Vice President of the United States said goodbye after serving one term in this institution.

It is pretty humbling, to understand how incredible it is to be part of this body and all the things that one can do.

I am standing right now to say thank you to a Member who is still serving, who I hope will serve for a long time, the Senator from Missouri, Mr. BOND. Sometimes we wait until folks leave until we express our deep appreciation for all they do and all they have accomplished. For me, I feel moved to do this for a little act of kindness, of help he gave some constituents of mine.

In the Omnibus bill we will vote on, hopefully, sometime this afternoon, there is \$388 billion laid out to be spent in that bill. The very last item of the 133 pages of the section that appropriates funds for the Veterans Administration and HUD, had to do with two individuals from Minnesota, Brian and Eric Simon, to receive \$200,000, to be split between them. That constitutes 1/20,000th of 1 percent of the allocations in that bill, but to those young men it is so important. Let me tell a little story about why it is important and who these young men are.

In 1983, Douglas Simon, the father of Brian and Eric Simon, served in the Army National Guard at Fort Benning, GA. He was injured. He required emergency medical surgery. Mr. Simon's surgery was performed at Fort Benning, GA. As part of the surgery, a blood transfusion of nine units was required. The blood he received was not screened and contained the AIDS/HIV virus.

In 1984, Mr. Simon married Nancy and they had three children together, Brian, Eric, and Candace. Before the virus took their lives, and ultimately the lives of Candace, the daughter, and the mom Nancy, the Simons were a smalltown American family: hopeful, conventional, meat and potatoes, church every Sunday, Roman Catholic family with a Virgin Mary statute in the front yard. Old Glory hung on the flagpole every clement day.

I am reading from and reflecting on an article written in 1994 about the Simons.

Doug and Nancy had met in high school. They got married after they graduated. He joined the Minnesota Army National Guard out of high school. He had an accident and underwent surgery. Nancy was older than a year by Doug and grew up close by, a

place called New Prague, MN, 1 of 11 children. She was quiet, timid.

When she and Doug first got married, they dreamed of having lots of kids. The oldest son is Brian. He was 10 in 1994 and he is 19 now. I got to know him. He was born before Doug and Nancy were infected. Eric escaped the virus, although he was born after Nancy had been infected.

They were just regular kids, lived a regular life, with a mom and a dad. They had a young sister, Candy. Candy was diagnosed with AIDS when she was 18 months old, in 1989. The doctors had treated her for a number of conditions. She had persistent diarrhea. She failed to thrive. She had countless CAT scans and blood tests. She learned how to push the plunger of a syringe as the myriad of medications increased. She went through a lot. She was, as her brothers tell me, a mischievous little girl, hamming it up, wearing Elton John-like oversized sunglasses, or a poster-child angel, always a mommy's girl.

Three months before preschool started, she complained about stomach pains. You know why it hurts? Because I have a bad tummy.

For her doctors, it was a little more puzzling than that, and x rays revealed spots on her colon the size of chicken pox. She suffered greatly. She suffered greatly. I almost tear up as I reflect on what this young girl went through. She died on June 25, wrapped in her mom's arms. She was a couple days shy of her sixth birthday. The mother also contracted AIDS and went through great pain and great suffering. Mom ultimately died of AIDS.

I got to know the family. My predecessor, Senator Wellstone, worked in trying to do something for them.

The VA provides health care to some 2,800 veterans who have contracted AIDS in the manner that Mr. Simon contracted AIDS. They provide disability compensation to veterans with AIDS and death and education benefits to the families of veterans who have succumbed to AIDS. In this respect, the VA treats AIDS like other service-connected health conditions.

But in an important way, AIDS is different. It is not like other connected services; it can be transmitted to the spouses and unborn children of servicemen. That is what happened here with Doug Simon. By law, the VA cannot provide any sort of benefits for illnesses contracted by these family members.

Last year, I introduced S. 1509, the Eric and Brian Simon Act. I thought it was a starting point to give a fair deal to veterans and their families with AIDS to provide a one-time \$100,000 benefit to veterans who receive AIDS as a result of a blood transfusion from the service-related injury. For spouses who contracted AIDS from contact with the infected veteran, and offspring of the veteran or spouse infected with AIDS at birth, in the event that the veteran or family member has already